

Regarding Inmate Ross Hayes #140420
Testimony of Bitter Hatred and Predigest – Turned to Love and Forgiving:
By: Dale Daverman

On May 31, 1974 while living in Grand Rapids, Michigan, I received a phone call from my dad at 11:00 PM. The neighbor next door to my 89 year old great aunt Kate was concerned because he hadn't seen any activity around the home all day and no lights came on after dark. My dad asked the neighbor to check out the house while he waited on the phone. The neighbor came back and told my dad that the house is dark and the back door is wide open and he was scared to go inside. My dad called the police, he and my mom picked me up at my house and we drove to Aunt Kate's house. When we arrived, 2 police cars were out front. I could see flash lights beaming inside the house. I immediately ran to the back door and entered the home startling the police officers who both drew their revolvers on me. I identified myself as a relative and continued walking through the house with the two officers. When we got to the dining room, we found my Aunt Kate lying on the floor below the telephone with a white handled steak knife embedded in her chest. That horrifying image is just as clear in my mind today as it was that evening over 32 years ago.

The crime lab was called and it didn't take them long to find a good set of finger prints on the bath room window cell where the perpetrators broke in. The next morning 2 black youths were arrested and taken into custody, Ross Hayes 16 and his cousin Rodney Scott 14.

Prior to the death of my great aunt, I was inducted into the Army. In 1968 while in boot camp at Fort Knox, Kentucky I was assaulted twice while walking back to my barracks at night. Both times Black people were involved. It was during this time that I developed a mistrust and dislike towards Black people.

At the time of my aunt's murder, I was too distraught and upset to attend the trial hearings. After the death of my great aunt, the mistrust and dislike I had for Black People turned into bitterness and hatred.

Several years went by and I often wondered what happened to the two youths. I knew that the 16 year old, Ross Hayes was convicted and pled guilty to second degree murder. I assumed both youths served time in juvenile detention and were probably released early because of their ages.

On Sunday, June 21, 1998 (Father's Day) an amazing transformation took place in my life. I was attending the evening worship service at my church, Grand Rapids First Assembly of God in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Evangelist and Viet Nam veteran Dave Roever preached that evening on forgiveness. Dave Roever had 40% of his body flesh blown away when a white sulfurous hand grenade blew up in his hand. He preached that evening on forgiveness. Being Father's Day, the focus of his message was directed towards the men in the audience, asking them to release any anger or malice they might

have towards their children, parents, former spouses, or anyone else. He asked them to turn that anger over to the Lord and to forgive those who have hurt them.

I grew up in a wonderful Christian family with wonderful loving parents. The anger I had inside me wasn't towards my parents or other family members, but rather towards Black People, particularly Ross Hayes, the Black youth who murdered my great aunt.

Dave Roeever had an alter call that evening. I felt convicted and for the first time in my life and I went forward. He and my pastor Wayne Benson laid hands on me and prayed over me in tongs, my legs became weak and I fell backward on the floor. In Pentecostal terms, "I was Slain in the Spirit". I really can't explain what happened but it was like a huge burden was lifted from my shoulders. That bitterness and hatred towards Black people and Ross Hayes was released from me. **I was set free.**

Several months later, another amazing event took place in my life. On December 5, 1999 I received a phone call from a lady by the name of Joan Hendrickson. She and her husband Bob are good friends of my father and mother in-law, Bill and Lois Holwerda. Bob Hendrickson was the varsity basketball coach at Ottawa Hills High School in Grand Rapids when Ross was arrested. Ross Hayes was an upcoming star athlete and was a good friend of Mark Hendrickson, the son of Bob and Joan. The Hendrickson's were devastated when they heard the news of Ross' arrest. Through the years they've kept in contact with Ross and are instrumental in seeking his parole. In casual conversation with my mother-in-law, it was revealed that Ross Hayes was the murderer of my great aunt Kate. Joan went on to explain that Ross was still incarcerated. At the time of the phone call he had been incarcerated for over 26 years. She told me that Ross was a Born Again Christian and that he was very remorseful for the murder of my great aunt, and that he's been a model prisoner for over 19 years. She went on to explain that he was married in prison and that his wife Shirley was an evangelist working in prison ministry.

Shirley Hayes, other family members, along with the Hendrickson's were working hard at seeking parole for Ross. Bill Forsyth, the Kent County, Michigan Prosecuting Attorney pledged his support in helping Ross get paroled as well. He instructed everyone involved to find any family member of Katherine Thomas and get their reaction to Ross' possible parole. It's amazing how the Lord put my mother in-law and Joan Hendrickson together that evening and how in general conversation it was revealed that I along with my brother and father are the only 3 surviving relatives of Kate Thomas.

I shared with Joan Hendrickson the experience I had that Sunday evening at Grand Rapids First a few months earlier and how the Lord released the bitter hatred I once had for Ross. I told her that I would have to talk with my brother and dad, the only other two surviving relatives of Katherine Thomas and get their reaction to Ross' possible parole. Joan put me in touch by phone with Ross' wife Shirley who was living in Orlando Florida at the time. I told her that I'd like to visit Ross one day in prison and she assured me that she'd arrange that meeting.

After talking with both my brother and father about the changes in Ross' life, neither one

had a problem if Ross were to be paroled.

In March of 1999 Shirley Hayes flew up from Florida and she and I drove to the Saginaw Correctional Facility, and I met Ross for the first time. It was a very emotional meeting as we both shed tears, hugged each other and prayed together. We had written each other a few times before our meeting and he had asked my forgiveness and that of my brother and father as well. At our meeting in the Saginaw Correctional Facility Ross verbally asked my forgiveness. **I forgave him.** I asked Ross to forgive me as well for the bitter hatred I once had towards him. **He forgave me.** Today, Ross and I are best friends

Since that meeting with Ross in Saginaw, he's been moved to several correctional facilities throughout the state. He's currently serving his time in the Ionia Max facility in Ionia and I visit him often. Several letters have been written on Ross' behalf by family members and me to Michigan State legislators, the parole board chairman, the Governor, and others. We keep running into bureaucratic road blocks. Ross pled 2nd degree murder with the possibility of parole after 15 years and yet he keeps being denied parole.

On July 8, 2004, Ross' family flew me in from Gallup, New Mexico, where I was residing at the time, to testify on Ross' behalf at his 5 year parole board hearing. It was my hope that my testimony would have a positive impact on the 10 parole board members. The vote was 5/5 and Ross was once again denied parole.

Ross has been involved in prison ministry for many years within the confines of the correctional facilities he's been in. God has placed him in that position. I believe there's an even grater ministry for Ross outside the walls of prison. I believe he could have a huge impact in the lives of many young people, speaking to them, deterring them from using drugs and alcohol and getting into trouble like he did.

Ross is not a threat to society! He has served his time. He has achieved several degrees while in prison and is a roll model prisoner. When Ross gets paroled, he will have support from his family, his lovely wife Shirley, support from friends, and support from me, a victim of his crime. He has job offers awaiting him and a wonderful home in Grand Rapids.

I believe God has a plan and a future for both Ross and me. That one day Ross and I can share our stories with young people, church groups, and others of how the Lord has changed our lives. **"What Satan meant for evil, God meant for good."**

Sincerely,

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One Attachment